

**CONFIDENTIAL****ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET****SUBJECT: (Optional)**

FBIS Lessons from the TWA Hijacking Experience

**FROM**Director, Foreign Broadcast  
Information Service  
Room 1013 Key Building**EXTENSION****NO.**

FBIS-0329/85

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**DATE**

7 August 1985

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**TO: (Officer designation, room number, and building)****DATE****RECEIVED****FORWARDED****OFFICER'S INITIALS****COMMENTS (Number each comment to show from whom to whom. Draw a line across column after each comment.)**1. Associate Deputy Director  
for Science and  
Technology

2. Room 6E45 - Headquarters

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Jim:

Per your request on "Lessons  
Learned" from TWA Hijacking.

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7 August 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Associate Deputy Director for Science and Technology

FROM:

Director, Foreign Broadcast Information Service

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SUBJECT: FBIS Lessons from the TWA Hijacking Experience

1. The major lesson learned by FBIS from its coverage of the TWA hijacking was that FBIS reportage remained valuable to our consumers even in the face of a massive international television blitz providing live relays of major events and interviews and commentary from participants. FBIS could not compete with U.S. media sources in their ability to interview participants and provide live television relays, but the unique FBIS capability to monitor and quickly translate and transmit information bearing on the hijacking from media sources throughout the region and the world provided the U.S. Government with needed information not otherwise available.

2. Three operational factors characterized FBIS service to the Intelligence Community in connection with the TWA hijacking: intensive coverage of key regional media; flexible and rapid shifts in monitoring targets in response to fast-changing events; and worldwide media coverage to provide a record of important diplomatic responses to the hijacking and its international implications:

+ Sign-on to sign-off coverage of several Middle East radios yielded a steady stream of bulletins on key developments. Of special note was coverage provided by government-sponsored Beirut Radio and by several clandestine Lebanese transmitters, each of which provided valuable information based on unique factional sources. The Druze-controlled Voice of the Mountain, for example, triggered an FBIS CRITIC when it carried the first monitored reports on the removal of the hostages from the aircraft and their relocation in West Beirut. Similarly, the Phalangist Voice of Lebanon carried an exclusive series of hijacker communiques and statements on their demands and conditions for the hostages' release. All Lebanese sources gave wide coverage to statements by Nabih Birri and other principals.

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+ Particularly at the outset of the crisis, FBIS employed the resources of several bureaus to provide reporting on the movement of the aircraft between Beirut and Algeria. The relatively new FBIS capability of monitoring satellite-transmitted media permitted FBIS to cover Algerian television reportage during the stops of the TWA aircraft in Algiers. All FBIS bureaus in the area extended hours of operation and closely coordinated coverage throughout the crisis.

+ The worldwide scope of FBIS coverage came sharply into play following requests from the offices of Vice President Bush and Secretary of State Shultz for summaries of international reaction to the Administration's call for diplomatic condemnations of the hijackers and their supporters. Two FBIS reports on this subject highlighted official government pronouncements on terrorism from Lebanon, Israel, Syria, Iran, Libya, and the Soviet Union, and outlined European and Asian reaction to the hijacking.

3. As the crisis wore on, the hijacking was covered exhaustively by U.S. media on the scene and as negotiations neared fruition in the final days FBIS-monitored sources became noticeably more circumspect. However, even in cases where FBIS reporting did not precede other media coverage or classified intelligence, community analysts were intensely interested in the extent of Lebanese, Algerian, and Syrian radio coverage of key diplomatic and military aspects of the situation, and in the substantiation of non-media source reports by FBIS-monitored media. FBIS provided numerous reports on the programming and content of these sources and on their political affiliations.

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